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Afterimages of steel: Dortmund

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Abstract

This essay works with afterimages of the steel industry to explore the material legacies and many afterlives of industrial remains in Dortmund. Inspired both by Walter Benjamin's writings on the afterimages of capitalist modernity in the *Arcades Project*, and by the afterimages of steel produced by Haiko Hebig, the paper gathers fragmented encounters in an account that evokes the materiality, textures, co-habitations and memories of Dortmund's post-industrial landscape.

Keywords: photography, industrial remains, Haiko Hebig, Walter Benjamin, Dortmund

Afterimages of steel: Dortmund

Afterimages

This essay is inspired by Walter Benjamin. In particular, it draws inspiration from the sprawling and incomplete notebooks of the *Arcades Project* in which Benjamin meticulously assembles a montage of material fragments and afterimages of Paris in the second half of the nineteenth century intended to provoke social and political awakening. In the *Arcades Project* Benjamin eschews the conventional historiography of the modern historian, embracing instead an approach more akin to a nineteenth-century collector of curiosities or rag picker (Leslie, 1999). Immersed in, and trawling through, the 'detritus' and 'refuse' of history, Benjamin seeks to uncover the mundane traces of daily life – the forgotten and neglected – in the outmoded Paris arcades, a built form that he considered to be 'the original temples of commodity capitalism' (Buck-Morss, 1989, p.83; Donald, 1999, p.44). In the decay and ruins of these once celebrated architectural forms Benjamin conjures afterimages of nineteenth century modernity and industrial culture with the aim of provoking what he refers to as 'profane illumination' (Benjamin, 1978, p.49). Benjamin's crafted montages of fragments aspired to an affect analogous to that of Proust's involuntary memory. Benjamin's fragmentary historical resources sought to create memory that flows 'of its own accord, unsettling the individual with the swarm of memories thought long-forgotten' (Crang and Travlou, 2001, 170) – 'involuntary memory is impromptu, bouncing off objects encountered randomly' (Leslie, 1999, 68). For Benjamin collecting fragments was a 'productive disorder', 'a form of practical remembering, wherein things 'step into *our* lives, not we into theirs.' (Buck-Morss, 1989, p.352). And the descent of the Paris arcades into decay and seediness by the 1920s exposed the hollowness and frailty of promises of progress and consumer happiness, and an opportunity to jar the collective from a phantasmagoria or dreamworld of false consciousness and stir a revolutionary class consciousness. As Kevin Hetherington (2005, p.188) writes of the *Arcades Project*: 'Revelation and awakening were the central motifs here and not interpretation'.

Benjamin's dense and convoluted writings on the modern capitalist city in the *Arcades Project* have been influential in shaping understandings of both the modern metropolis and the afterimages of capitalist modernity (Buck-Morss, 1989; Cohen, 1995; Donald, 1999; Gilloch, 1997; Pred, 1995). Yet the impact of his insights on thinking about the afterimages of industry and industrial ruins is less obvious.ⁱ This essay is an experiment in thinking with the material remains of industry in ways that take seriously Benjamin's tactics of 'revelation' and 'awakening'. Using images of landscapes of deindustrialisation produced by Dortmund photographer Haiko Hebig, alongside ethnographic insights from touring and 'botanising on the asphalt' with Hebig (Benjamin, 1973, 36), the essay

gathers fragments to produce afterimages of steel in Dortmund. Embracing Benjamin's evocative phrase 'botanising on the asphalt' as a guide for encountering and witnessing the seething materiality and vitality of the city, I develop a sense of the urban spaces as multi-layered, labyrinthine and shaped by many, and competing stories (Clarke 2000; Pinder, 2001). My account stages a series of ambivalent encounters with unexpected, overlooked and ephemeral elements found in the landscapes of deindustrialisation that have been left after the closure of Dortmund's integrated steel plant. The result is fragmentary afterimages of steel that offer a fertile resource for attending to the lively materiality and ghostly traces of the industrial past. These afterimages extend the social life of architecture and the paraphernalia of industrial production beyond the point of dismantling and destruction; they heighten tensions between economic redevelopment, cultural memory and regional identities forged through coal and steel production; they examine how abandoned landscapes and undesired industrial structures become valued objects and iconic features of the post-industrial city (van der Hoorn, 2003); and they open up intractable questions about memory, contrasting formal attempts to commemorate the past by fixing meaning in material remnants with unruly performances of remembering as encounters with material remains spark involuntary memories.

Haiko Hebig is a photographer whose interest in photography has dovetailed with a fascination with industrial technologies and structures, and the mundane landscapes these forms inhabit. Hebig is concerned with documenting in detail the residual landscapes of capitalism. In this sense, he is influenced by the New Topographics movement that was pioneered by Bernd and Hilla Becher. The Bechers developed a detached, matter-of-fact photography to compile a comprehensive archive of vernacular industrial structures from across northwest Europe. And while Hebig's photographs do not work in the same photographic style or aesthetic registers as the Bechers, he has been influenced by their working style. In particular, his photographs exhibit a shared commitment to the precise and detailed documentation of landscapes of deindustrialisation, as well as an emphasis on collecting and a quest for completeness. But above all else Hebig's photographs betray an eye for the abandoned, the overlooked, and for entropy. They bring into focus the mundane, half-hidden traces of daily life – and not celebrated events, forms or figures. Haiko Hebig, then, is a photographer working in a minor tradition. His project of photographing and documenting the afterimages of steel in Dortmund forms part of a 'dispersed visual discourse on the city' (Crang, 1996, 432). A minor tradition of doing 'salvage photography' that couples a 'sense of dispersed memory with a structure of photography, always looking to the moment when 'now' becomes the past; petrifying time into space' (Crang, 1996, 449). This emphasis on a minor tradition is not a

commentary on the influence of Hebig's photography or other cultural work around industrial change – which since Robert Smithson's 'A Tour of the Monuments of Passiac' have become a significant, and perhaps overworked cult. The insistence on a 'minor' tradition is, instead, a reflection on the kind of politics performed through these photographs. Hebig's images articulate alternative, dissident stories of Dortmund that contest dominant visions for the city. Positioning Hebig's work within this tradition lends itself to thinking with Walter Benjamin, particularly given Benjamin's fascination with the photography of Eugène Atget – whose images of Paris sought out and documented the overlooked and abandoned. Atget's images integrated art and record, and provided a 'way of seeing aesthetic value where none had been suspected' (Wollen, 1978, 20; see also Benjamin, 2009).ⁱⁱ And like Walter Benjamin, Hebig is also a collector – a modern-day rag picker scouring the post-industrial landscape. As the industrial structures that had formed the backdrop of everyday life in Dortmund started to disappear with the closure of the city's sprawling steel plant, Hebig began to take photographs to preserve in celluloid what was being erased from the urban landscape. Over the years he has assembled a personal archive that houses material fragments and afterimages of steel. Some of his archive is publicly accessible through a website (<http://phoenixgesellschaft.de>), and he has exhibited his work locally in the Ruhr region. But much remains unpublished. It resides in unscanned photographs, in his collection of old maps and local history books, and in material fragments (technical drawings, found photographs, bits of industrial technology) accumulated over the years. This essay explores the afterimages of steel that Hebig's personal archive produces. It moves through a set of fragments each of which takes one of Hebig's photographs as catalyst and point of departure.

Dortmund

Blast furnaces, gasometers and collieries didn't just make their mark on the city's appearance, but also on its soul. Dortmund was the city of grafters, industrial workers. After a day of heavy physical work they washed down the dust with beer and relaxed on the football field. So it was only logical that the end of the old industries wouldn't only have an effect on the city's skyline. When the structures changed so did the inhabitants' mentalities and their leisure choices. Out of the city of work has grown a city of new life cultures.

(www.dortmund.de/en)

City visionaries in Dortmund celebrate the transition of the city's identity from 'Steel City' to the 'New Dortmund',ⁱⁱⁱ mobilising discourses moulded to accommodate restless capital through the neo-liberal logics of regeneration and redevelopment. Industrial legacies of coal, steel and beer are marginalised in a post-industrial landscape populated by shops, science districts, museums, galleries, theatres, and concentrations of cutting-edge industries. The old industrial triad has disappeared (in

the re-branding of the city, if not materially) and replaced by nanotechnology, software development, logistics, and creative industries. The vision for Dortmund's future articulated in the narratives of urban renaissance deployed by the city administration, planners, redevelopment agencies and other city boosters relies on the fabrication and enactment of a particular industrial past.^{iv} These changes in Dortmund have been part of a wider transformation of abandoned industrial landscapes in the Ruhr through the Emscher Park International Building Exhibition (IBA). The economic and ecological redevelopment of landscapes devastated by mining and heavy industry has woven together 'a historicizing impulse with the intention to renew and naturalize broad swaths of the German countryside' (Barndt, 2010, 271). The industrial past is preserved and recalled in aesthetically regulated way in a new 'contrived natural environment of parks, lakes and gardens' (ibid.). And so, Dortmund's industrial past is enacted primarily through the preservation of specific industrial monuments that are anchor points on the Ruhr's industrial heritage trail and the recycling and gentrification of old industrial buildings as call centres, conference rooms, exhibition spaces, studios and shops (Hospers, 2004). Mobilising a linear sense of memory that is entangled with a particular vision of the city's future, the industrial past is fossilised at key sites through industrial heritage tourism and industrial monuments. Particular landscapes and landmarks are selected and highlighted as historic sites for the enactment of cultural remembering and regional identification in the face of economic restructuring. Elsewhere, abandoned industrial spaces have been converted into high-end cultural venues (galleries spaces, design museums), coming to embody an economic transformation from Fordism to post-Fordism, the commodification of culture and processes of gentrification.

But memory exists outside such dedicated spaces of memory, heritage and memorialisation (see DeSilvey, 2010). In this essay, I am interested in a more unruly and performative sense of memory that is triggered through encounters with ruins, traces and material fragments. Karen Till (2008, 101-2) has recently argued for 'a memory studies agenda that remains sensitive to the ways individuals and groups understand their pasts and possible futures through the relationships they and other have with place'. In this spirit, the afterimages of steel presented here offer encounters with industrial places coming apart to animate different industrial pasts and alternative stories of the post-industrial city. Developing a dynamic, and performative understanding of memory these afterimages suggest how industrial remains might provoke memories of abandoned futures (Edensor, 2008); how cultural memory operate through decay and entropy as well as stabilised material remnants (DeSilvey 2006); how processes of dismantling can produce alternative engagements with knowing (Varvantakis, 2009). The effect is a montage of fragmentary encounters

with the industrial remains of the steel plant that once dominated Dortmund. The narrative moves in fits and starts to construct an account that evokes the materiality, textures, co-habitations and memories of a post-industrial urban landscape. It is a stuttering account woven through photography, quotation, dense description, ethnography and evocation that is self-consciously fashioned against the grain of dominant visions of urban renaissance. The montage form brings alive multiple sets of memories, perspectives and ways of knowing in place. Montage offers a methodological tactic for dealing with the elusive, disorderly, multiple and messy nature of industrial remains and the memories and stories they provoke. This montage – unlike the enactments of the past in the vision of the city's elite – refuses to tell a coherent, or complete story (Law, 2005). It does not smooth over multiple pasts, memories and ways of knowing. Instead the afterimages produce a partial and suggestive account of industrial remains in Dortmund that plays on tensions between economic restructuring and preservation; between progress and relations to the past; between the different ways in which memory functions; and evokes the multiple pasts and many stories that shape our experiences of the post-industrial city.

Beyond the preserved industrial monuments and gentrified industrial buildings, Dortmund's industrial past has not been exorcised from the everyday urban landscape. The excessive materialities of industrial remains repeatedly pierce everyday life in encounters with barren parks; abandoned railway yards; kilometres of pipework; expanses of concrete wasteland; weathered sheds; technology parks; industrial heritage museums; contaminated soil; workers housing, and so on. And these moments of encounter offer – or perhaps, more aptly, aggravate – stories of another post-industrial Dortmund. In part these are stories that look back to the past, as the rest of the city looks forward. But there are other stories to be told. Stories that invoke different versions of the industrial past and different visions for the future; stories that alert us to the different temporalities through the contingency of things we assume will endure, and the persistence of unseen legacies; and stories that play on the tensions between different modes of remembering. Stories of enclosure of nature, exploitation and desertion as capitalism and modernisation pile up on the landscape as the detritus of history; stories of the decline of a German 'molecular empire' that was built on modern chemistry's capacity to synthesise materials from the waste products of coal and steel industries (Leslie, 2005; Taussig, 2009);^v stories of unemployment, hardship, and dreams of escape and return; stories of diverse forms of social, biological and chemical life cohabiting; stories of different tactics of remembering, preserving and erasing industrial heritage.

The afterimages of steel and the fragments they inspire provide what Walter Benjamin (1999a) might have called 'historical constellations'. They may not achieve the 'profane illumination' and

political awakening that Benjamin sought, but they do provide a promising tactic for attending to the materiality and many afterlives of industrial remains. And so the material traces, residues and remnants of the industrial past in Dortmund tell other, often disjointed, stories about everyday urban landscapes and work to overwhelm the ordinary flow of time as different temporalities collide and mingle in ways that 'rebuke tendencies to move on and forget'; these traces bear witness to 'failed plans, visionary projects, and sites of collective endeavour and pleasure' in ways that interfere with the manufactured pasts used to promote urban renaissance (Edensor, 2008, 313).

Ruin



Source: Photograph by Haiko Hebig

In the ruin, in confrontation with the scraps and shadowy forms of the recent past, the realisation dawns, that the myth of an ever more advanced industrial production as emblematic of linear progress is instead better represented as a circular process through which things become obsolete, are thrown away, later recycled or replaced in pursuit of the always new.

(Edensor, 2005a, 101)

A photograph of the former Phoenix West site in Dortmund. A single concrete ruined structure remains. The industrial technologies and architectural forms and structures that until recently occupied and worked on this site have been dismantled. All that remains is this ruined coal bunker and piles of debris.

The scene evokes Walter Benjamin's reading of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*. The viewer is confronted by the material legacies of the irresistible force of progress:

But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.

(Benjamin, 1999a, 249)

In parts of Dortmund progress assumes the form of a pile of debris. This is the side of progress that city elites want move over and do away with. Filled with junk from the past, this image speaks to the

delay and entropy between a vision and the materialisation of that vision. But the physical entropy and material remainders of this ruin also incite reflection on a once robust manufacturing economy, on the decline of Germany's 'molecular empire', and on a past where work in heavy industry defined class and family relations. This site, once traversed by flows of bodies, money, energy, material, and traffic, is now marginal to these flows (cf. Edensor, 2005, 829). The ruin offers, perhaps, a moment of profane illumination that disrupts progress as city visionaries see it. Susan Buck-Morss, writes:

The debris of industrial culture teaches us not the necessity of submitting to historical catastrophe, but the fragility of the social order that tells us catastrophe is necessary. The crumbling of monuments that were built to signify the immortality of civilisation becomes proof, rather, of its transiency. And the fleetingness of temporal power does not cause sadness; it informs political practice.

(Buck-Morss, 1991, 179)

Industrial ruins do not simply offer 'Baroque dramatisation'; ruins are politically instructive (Buck-Morss, 1991). The decaying architecture and accumulating debris of ruins expose the transitory, fragile but also destructive nature of capitalism (Berman, 1984; Harvey, 1989). While the ruins of ancient civilisations in Ephesus, Athens or Rome inspire awe and wonder amongst hordes of tourists, the ruins of the industrial age in places like Dortmund might be politically instructive. They emphasise how mass destruction is as integral to capitalist modernity as production and consumption, and alerts us to the alienation and trauma that accompanies destruction and abandonment, as work, ways of life, identifications, and family structures unravel.

But this ruin also intrudes upon and unsettles linear senses of time endemic to the vision of a transition from 'Steel City' to 'New Economy'. The unfinished disposal of the industrial past ruptures any imagined shift to the new economy (Hetherington, 2001); ruins disturb triumphalist stories of progress. Ruins are performative and ghostly spaces; they 'linger and echo in a simultaneous lack/excess' (Stewart, 1996, 67; see also Edensor, 2005b; Hetherington, 2001). The ruin exceeds the stabilised versions of the past fabricated by city visionaries; it creates space for dissenting voices, counter-memories and alternative futures.

One part of the ghostliness of mundane ruins is their uncanny ability to produce a sense of time out of joint. The excesses of materiality and meaning in ruins mean that the sensuous experience and affects of moving through ruins – negotiating rubble and jagged edges, or encountering rusting machinery and tumbledown architectural forms – can evoke all kinds of memories: the grind of daily rhythms and routines; faded aspirations for an industrial future; trauma and loss; dreams of return (cf. Stewart, 1996). These unruly performances of remembering enable the ruin to disrupt both

linear temporalities that surface in the marketing of the post-industrial city, but also the disciplining of relationships to the past through the regulated aesthetics of museums and other monuments. The ruin and what remains of the industrial past is a fracture in the post-industrial landscape; this afterimage captures the melancholia and a sense of shame that an industrial past is being lost. After all with the sale of the Phoenix steel plant and the demise of steel making in Dortmund, the nation that in the post-war period had exported the means of production to the rest of the world was now exporting the capacity to manufacture the things it used to produce.

Contingency



Source: Photograph by Haiko Hebig

Or, 'ALL ARCHITECTURE IS BUT WASTE IN TRANSIT!!'

(Till, 2009, 67)

In his book *Architecture Depends* Jeremy Till retells Le Corbusier's account of a journey through the mining area of Flanders during which he encounters sublime monuments – slag heaps silhouetted against the sky, and for a moment he dreams that he is among the Pyramids in Giza. Till (2009, 69) writes:

What Le Corbusier exposes is that the two states of matter, slagheap and eternal pyramid, are kept apart only by the most fragile of defences – an appeal to the spirit and the notion of intent. The pyramid is not classified as waste because it is the product of intentional human action guided by the mystery of the spirit. Demolition and construction, waste and order are kept apart through the disciplinary politics of the boundary between the two.

What to make of this photograph of a demolished gas holder? A vast structure that used to contain the cleaned gases that were by-products of industrial processes, now reduced to debris. A contorted, twisted structure that has started to be invaded by plant and animal life. This afterimage of a once monumental architectural structure evokes how construction and demolition, order and waste, are kept apart by the most fragile defences in other ways. The twisted remains of this gas holder speak to what Jeremy Till calls the contingency of architecture. While architecture is often associated with coherence, order and beauty, this photograph evokes what architecture represses – contingency (Till, 2009, 35-40). This gas holder was originally conceived as a part of an industrial assemblage that articulated the necessity of ordering, scheduling and controlling flows of materials, energy and bodies. But in its demolition its contingency is revealed (Edensor, 2001; Jacobs, 2006). The contorted remains of this gas holder rupture the coherent givenness that was assumed when it was a self-evident thing – a gas holder. The remains make visible the things that previously held it together, as well as the energies of the people who designed it; built it; worked in it; repaired and maintained it; and decided to abandon and demolish it. It reminds us that architectural arrangements are necessarily temporary, unstable and contingent. The rusting debris of this structure challenges the enduring fiction of architecture's first principles: order, stability and coherence (Till, 2009).

Human Traces



Source: Photograph by Haiko Hebig

The regimes of the city are crossed over, graffitied, reworked, picked over like a trash heap and used to different ends. They are plagued by unchanneled mobility and unwarranted consumption that feeds, unabashed, no excess in the sign value of commodities. And they can never encompass or exclude what is radically outside: the sources of what sociologists call 'sub-cultures'; the voices of evasion, separation, resistance and refusal; the inaudible or indecipherable voices that cannot speak in the city *as given*, but that are driven to go on speaking on other cities, out of the pain of their silence.

(Tagg, 1996, 181)

In this photograph traces of human presence surface. Narrow walkways and staircases; a lift; and the smooth, worn handrails hint at the bodily work that used to be performed in this manufacturing space. The confusion of pipework and cabling suggest the complex arranging, ordering and sequencing of material flows (of gases, water, electricity, etc) that were once necessary to perform the work of steelmaking. Riveted patches and pieces of less worn pipe intimate the work of repair and maintenance required to hold the assemblage together. While the banal rhythms of the working day appear only obliquely in this image, elsewhere Dortmund's industrial remains reveal other materials - discarded gloves, silent machines, rotting newspapers, a calendar hanging on the wall, battered tables, unplugged telephones and smashed computer screens – give a sense of how working bodies inhabited industrial spaces (Edensor, 2001). But the graffiti-ed surfaces in the photograph also provide material traces of more recent human inhabitations of this space. The

graffiti evokes the transgressive and transcendent possibilities of ruins where regulation of everyday life in the city may be evaded (Edensor, 2005a). And so, industrial remains are open to reworking and appropriation by graffiti artists, drug users and abusers, dog walkers, homeless people, and so on.

Persistence



Source: Photograph by Haiko Hebig

On a sunny Tuesday morning, June 4, 2002, in the grate over the storm drain to the Chesapeake Bay in front of Sam's Bagels on Cold Spring Lane (which was being repaved), there was:

one large men's black plastic work glove
a matted mass of tree pollen pods
one dead rat who looked asleep
one white plastic bottle cap
one smooth stick of wood

As I looked at these items, they shimmied back and forth between trash and thing—between, on one hand, stuff to ignore (notable only as a residue of human action and inaction: the litterer's incivility, the neighbor's failure to keep the storm drain clear, Sam's vermin-eradication efforts, the Department of Public Works' road maintenance schedule) and, on the other hand, stuff that commands attention as vital and alive in its own right, as an existant in excess of its reference to human flaws or projects. The second kind of stuff has thing-power: it commands attention, exudes a kind of dignity, provokes poetry, or inspires fear.

(Bennett, 2004, 349-350)

An encounter with a pile of trash on a Baltimore street provides Jane Bennett with the opening for a set of reflections on the possibilities of a vital materialism grounded in enchantment and attentive to the ways in which mundane things command our attention. But materials can be vital without being enchanting; they can command our attention in ways that demand respect, rather than inspiring generosity (Gregson *et al.*, 2010, 29).

This photograph hints obliquely at the persistence and liveliness of matter. The only surface traces of the vitality and persistence of the hazardous materials that contaminate the land around this site is its bleakness and the waterlogged grass in the foreground of the image. This austere and desolate public space seemingly devoid of much human, plant and animal life testifies to the obduracy and performativity of particular hazardous materials. The site is marked by histories of contamination and botched remediation. Until the late 1970s, a coke oven by-product plant stood on this ground releasing – over tens of years – unknown quantities of heavy metals and carcinogens. Inorganic compounds capable of conjoining with organic bodies; threatening to harm and even snuff out life (see also Gregson *et al.*, 2010 on the vital materialism of asbestos). After the coke oven closed the land was inadequately remediated and then redeveloped as housing. A cancer cluster emerged within the first decade of the redevelopment. The bodies of local residents had been exposed to the deadly vitality of matter. The liveliness and persistence of matter commanded human attention, but through registers of fear and respect, not enchantment and generosity. In the end the housing was razed and an impermeable skin – designed to prevent hazardous materials penetrating human bodies – was put down. And so a photograph of a climbing wall in a park, only remarkable at first glance due to the apparent absence of life, tells a very different story about vital materialism and the liveliness and persistence of some materials. A different kind of memory trace.

Disappearance



Source: Photograph by Haiko Hebig

All that is solid melts into air.

(Marx and Engels, 1967, 223)

The Phoenix East site has been razed and is being prepared for flooding. The site is being redeveloped as Phoenix See, a space of leisure and managed nature. The plans show a boating lake and nature reserve, both lined by residential developments. The material traces of the industrial past are being excavated and drowned. This story of disappearance provokes two entangled reflections. The first relates to a narrative of regenerative nature (cf. Krupar, 2007). The second examines the lake as counter-monument (Young, 1992).

The redevelopment of the Phoenix site as Phoenix See seeks to perform a cleansing through narratives of a return to nature – albeit a radically altered and managed nature. When complete in May 2011 the lake will obscure the material traces of a history of environmental disturbance and exploitative practices. And so environmental disturbance continued in the name of environmental non-disturbance as earthmovers ceaselessly excavated and demolished, vast pipes carrying waste

gases around the city were buried and shafts were filled, as the work the redevelopment agency sought to harness the regenerative resources of nature. The performance of the return of nature myth is staged with the aid of viewing platforms instructing viewers about the non-human species that inhabit the site; a landscape of deindustrialisation is transformed into a wildlife repository and recreational space. But this performance stutters. When most of the site had been demolished and excavated, half a shed remained until days before the official opening of the Phoenix See. During the 1990s the steel company had leased the shed to a forging company. The forge outlived the steel plant. The forge had been willing to relocate if the redevelopers paid, but alternative space had been demolished in recent years and the City administration refused planning permission for a new shed because it was at odds with their vision of Dortmund's rebirth as a centre for creative and cultural industries. So the forge remained. The developers cut the shed in half, but its continued existence offered a stubborn industrial remainder and threatened to undermine the renaturalisation myth. In the end, the forge was lured away and the site was hastily cleared in time for the flooding. A return to nature is successfully staged?

Alternatively, the drowning of this site by the Phoenix See solicits questions about how the industrial past might be remembered. This lake might be compared to the empty space and negative form of the counter-monument, more usually associated with the Holocaust memorials in Germany (Young, 1992). The logic of the counter-monument plays on a conviction that the more memory rests in exteriorised forms, the less it is experienced internally. Counter-monuments encourage a re-thinking of the relation between memory and disappearance; they teach us that memory also works through absence. And so, while this emptied and flooded space is not an official counter-monument, the disappearance of the industrial use of this site might oblige people to reflect and remember. The process of flooding and erasing the material traces of the industrial past might offer alternative engagements with memory, with different outcomes to the stabilised industrial monuments.

Folly



Source: Photograph by Haiko Hebig

On examination, the folly is, on one level, genuinely a meaningless object, a reassemblage of once-meaningful terms to make a nonsense out of them. With no hidden political agenda, no revolutionary aesthetic or social aim, and no historicist nostalgia, the allusion to constructivism becomes a mad shot in the dark that at once cherishes avant-gardism but comprehends its madness. On another level, the folly is precisely calculated for its own purposes: an object fully expressed without a function to express. Empty or full of one activity or another, it is still full of architectural meaning; or rather, paraarchitectural significance. Its cubic skeleton, exploded elements, lack of classical “knowledge,” and refusal of romantic formulas betray a sign of architecture denatured. Without origin, and with no certain end, the folly stands on its own, so to speak.

(Vidler, 1992, 110)

Today, with the aid of massive regeneration funds from the EU the Phoenix West site is being redeveloped as a hi-tech industrial park. At the moment the site is remediated and primed for the arrival of new capital with roads laid and pathways expensively paved. But what is perhaps most interesting about the photograph is how it hints at how industrial heritage is being displayed in this

part of Dortmund. On the road into the site you pass four obsolete cooling towers – two concrete and two steel – which have been stripped back to their steel and concrete skeletons, providing a post-industrial gateway to the site. Near the entrance of the site the carcasses of one and a half blast furnaces – the ones that were not sold – remain. The material remains of industry on this site are carefully arranged through the managed juxtaposition of ruins with new build hi-tech industries and brick built sheds that remain as performance spaces (one shed houses video installation art works and another was too drafty and environmentally unsound to be converted into office space as planned, so now stands empty and is only occasionally used as a party venue). Sensitive to the fact that these industrial buildings embodied the functionalism of the ‘New Objectivity’ architectural movement of the 1920s and 1930s, urban planners decided that the most faithful way to preserve these buildings built for industrial production was to put them to new productive use. Meanwhile the ruins on this site are carefully preserved and aesthetically regulated. Redevelopers have collected fragments of the past and remove clutter in an attempt to bring industrial remains out of the realm of the ‘unknowable and unambiguous’ in order to stage a manufactured past of heavy industry that fits in with the city’s imagined future (Edensor, 2005b). And so, the invasion of plant life controlled, and the aesthetics of the ruin ‘enhanced’ with the removal of some elements – like a control room appended at 3rd floor level to the blast furnace or the rotting wood attached to cooling towers – and the addition of other elements. For example removed pipe work has been cleaned up and replaced to make the ruins look more authentic; the irony being that 2 miles down the road the city redevelopment agency has been busy burying pipes still in use today, because it contradicts their visions for a return to nature myth on that site.

This photograph captures the impulse to stabilise and fix that Caitlin DeSilvey (2007a) identifies in her struggles with dealing with mess and mutable things on a homestead in Montana. There is an effort to orchestrate ruins for aesthetic impact and to produce atmosphere. The social significance of these material remains relies on their physical preservation. These ruins are curated. But curating them involves what DeSilvey (2007a) calls a ‘semiotic thinning’ so that objects behave appropriately in the hi-tech landscape they now inhabit. Cooling towers are stripped back to provide neat lines; pipes with no function are added; the invasion of plant and animal life is managed so that the ruin maintains an air of authenticity, without threatening the physical permanence of the blast furnace as vast artefact. The chemical and biological lives of these material remains have to be controlled, and ecological processes of disintegration and regeneration truncated for these ruins to perform. These processes of curation and preservation risk sanitizing the past; they efface social history so that loss can be experienced as a source of pleasure (Kohn, 2009). Former ‘workplace-based class

identification' with the landscape is re-orientated as an 'affective relationship with the region's location and history' (Barndt, 2010, 277). This afterimage captures the tensions and the contradictions in preserving the past, and exposes the labour that is expended to fabricate the industrial past in ways that fit in with a dominant vision of Dortmund's future.

Museum



Source: Photograph by Haiko Hebig

But I am not that interested in museums. If find them dead and even hostile places, created for a bored bourgeoisie bereft of life and experience. What I am interested in is...life...

(Taussig, 2004, xix)

This photograph stages a stark juxtaposition. In the foreground the material excess of industrial remains is laid bare. The lack of aesthetic regulation in the piles of debris generated by demolition work on part of the Hansa Coke industrial complex is particularly striking. Populated by rubble, dust, pathways, jagged metal edges, pools of unidentifiable liquid, concealed holes, crumbling matter and all manner of other obstacles and hidden dangers these ruins demands a thoroughly embodied engagement (Edensor, 2005b). And yet, just a couple of hundred metres away, beyond a rickety and leaky fence – around the buildings that form the backdrop of this image – the material excesses of

the ruin are suppressed by the artful logic of the museum cabinet. When the coke ovens closed part of the site was lithified as an industrial heritage museum – an anchor point on the *Route Industriekultur*, an industrial heritage trail that snakes through the Ruhr connecting twenty-five abandoned industrial sites. On this side of the fence industrial remains are aesthetically and sensually purified and regulated for the circulation of tourists (Edensor, 2005b). Guided tours by passionate museum staff evoke the experiences of industrial work at the coke ovens and inform visitors of the rare plant and animal life that now inhabit the site. But in the museum, the incommensurable mingling of things in the ruins is replaced by the careful presentation of historical artefacts against uncluttered backdrops (Edensor, 2001). A vast structure housing four giant gas pumps that circulated waste gases through Dortmund's network of pipelines now doubles as an exhibition and performance space. The grime, noise, confusion and material excess of an industrial workspace has given way to a commodified and sanitized space designed to satiate the mores of tourists and a local cultural elite. Blackened walls and ceilings have been whitewashed; oil stained floors have been polished; aged pumps have been renovated; the deafening rumble of machinery replaced by the muffled tones of tourists moving between display boards. In the museum, processes of cultural appropriation and re-signification appear complete as industrial remains are transformed into 'post-industrial landmarks of leisure activities, aesthetic contemplation and thrills' (Barndt, 2010, 279). But the material excess and the unruly possibilities for remembering on the other side of the fence suggests the incomplete nature of this appropriation and hints at other stories of the industrial past.

Feral natures



Source: Photograph by Haiko Hebig

The fecund world of creatures and plants as active agents in the making of environments remains firmly outside the city limits, and those feral spaces in the city that most sustain them are caste as “wastelands” ripe for development.

(Whatmore and Hinchliffe, 2003, 142)

This photograph bears witness to the colonisation of a chemical by-products plant of an abandoned coke oven plant by biological life. In doing so, it evocatively introduces the cohabitation of biological, chemical, material and social life that is evident throughout the post-industrial landscapes of Dortmund.

The image introduces a number of themes. First it provides a compelling material reminder of the ontological heterogeneity of urban inhabitants and disrupts any opposition of cities and nature, and unsettles a geography of modernity that holds humans and non-humans apart (Hinchliffe *et al.*, 2005; Whatmore and Hinchliffe, 2003). It acknowledges the co-presence of biological and chemical life with social life in ruins. It opens space for thinking about the more-than-human urban geographies and understanding living cities as ‘ecological co-fabrications’ where the inhabitations

and rhythms of humans and non-humans might work against the grain of the 'expert designs of capital, state, science and planning' (Whatmore and Hinchliffe, 2006). Indeed, such more-than-human geographies may challenge a model of planning that simply services capital, providing the impetus for thinking differently about how to plan for the post-industrial city.

But the presence of plant life and evidence of decay also allude to material transformations in ruins. Tim Edensor (2005b, 318) suggests: "processes of decay and the obscure agencies of intrusive humans and nonhumans transform the familiar material world, changing the form and textures of objects, eroding their assigned functions and meanings, and blurring the boundaries between things". Decay and the intrusions of non-human life do at least two things. First is introduces a different temporality – a temporality of ruins characterised by ecological cycles of death and decay, composition and decompositions, rather than those of linear progress. But processes of decay also alert us to the mutable character of material presence, and the transformative powers of decay and revitalisation. While the onset of decay and entropy is often seen as destruction – as the erasure of material residues and history that might be enrolled into the preservation of human memories – Caitlin DeSilvey (2006, 328) asks whether cultural remembering might proceed 'not through reflection on a static material remnant, but on the process that slowly pulls the remnant into other ecologies and expressions of value - accommodating simultaneous resonances of death and rebirth, loss and renewal.' Might material remnants release of meaning in their decay? Indeed they might offer opportunities for political awakening, or at least an acknowledgement of other potential orderings, perhaps along the lines of a politics of conviviality in the city as ecological co-fabrication (Whatmore and Hinchliffe, 2006).

Taking Benjamin elsewhere

The situation [in capitalist society as a whole] is now becoming so complicated that a simple "reproduction of reality" says less than ever about reality itself. A photograph of the Krupp works or of the AEG says practically nothing about these institutions. Reality has shifted into the realm of the functional. The reification of human relationships, such as the factory, no longer betrays anything about these relationships. And so what we actually need is to "construct something," something "artificial," "posed." What we therefore equally need is art. But the old concept of art based on experience is invalid. For whoever reproduces those aspects of reality that can be experienced does not reproduce reality. For some time reality has not longer been experienceable as a totality.

(Brecht, 1992, 469 cited in Long, 2008, 201)

In this well-known passage Bertholt Brecht argues that a documentary photograph of a Krupp factory conceals as much as it discloses. The image of the Krupp works tells us very little about 'Krupp as a firm, about its place in the economic and political structure of Germany, the exploitation

of its workers, and so on' (Wollen, 1978, 23). Benjamin (1999) in his essay *Brief History of Photography* uses Brecht's example of the Krupp factory and shares Brecht's concern about the sterility and epistemological poverty of at least certain forms of photography, and most notably those approaches with pretensions to objectivity and realism. Interested in how photography might be exploited to produce knowledge as well as art, Benjamin concludes that captions are vital. Words give images meaning.

But nearly 80 years after Brecht's and Benjamin's musings on this photograph of a Krupp factory, the afterimages of steel produced by Haiko Hebig's photographs of a Thyssen Krupp works lying in ruins in Dortmund evoke all kinds of realities and relations. Hebig's photographs produce art and knowledge simultaneously. His photographs slip and slide between categories like art, document, evidence, muse and provocation. Working with the instability of a photograph as a material artefact and the mobility of photographs between categories, Hebig's photographs want and do different things. They suggest all kinds of relations, cohabitations and afterlives; they evoke moods; they solicit historicisation; they introduce multiple temporalities; they question the multiple ways in which memory-work is done in place; they illustrate stories to be told. They move between information, affect and reflection. The accumulated effect of these afterimages of steel is an account of a post-industrial city that refuses to cohere, offer certainty or draw more or less stable conclusions. Instead, these afterimages sits provocatively alongside the vision of a city elite who celebrate the shift in Dortmund's identity from 'Steel City' to the 'New Dortmund', all the while mobilising discourses moulded to accommodate restless capital through the neo-liberal logics of regeneration and redevelopment. Perhaps the difference between Brecht's documentary photograph and Hebig's afterimages lies in the aesthetic registers they work in. Or perhaps it is the disembowelled factory, lying in ruin and decay – as opposed to the black box of the factory captured in the image Brecht refers to – that discloses so much about the histories and afterlives of these industrial remains. Or maybe Benjamin was right all along, and the afterimages of steel acquire their resonance and significance through the intermingling of photography, title and narrative.

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Biography

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ⁱ Although Kathleen Stewart's (1996) *Space on the Other Side on the Road* and Tim Edensor's (2005a) *Industrial Ruins* provide notable exceptions.

ⁱⁱ In his essay *Brief history of Photography* Benjamin (2009, 183-4) describes Atget's images of Paris as the forerunner of Surrealist photography, positioning Atget as the pioneer of a minor tradition in photography: 'Atget, almost invariably, ignored 'the major sights and so-called landmarks', simply passing them by; but not a long line of bootlasts; not the Parisian courtyards where from dusk to dawn rows of handcarts stand waiting;

not the uncleared tables and stacks of washing-up seen in simultaneous profusions; not the brothel at no.5 Rue..., the '5' appearing at four different points on the façade of the building, hugely magnified' (Benjamin, 2009, 185).

ⁱⁱⁱ Although it should be noted that Dortmund is not the only city claiming to be Germany's capital of the 'new economy'. Other contenders include Berlin, Leipzig and Munich.

^{iv} Between 1989 and 1999 the Emscher Park International Building Exhibition (IBA) oversaw the economic, social and ecological reconstruction of 800km² along the river Emscher between Dortmund and Duisburg. Subtitled the 'Workshop for the future of old industrial regions' the Emscher Park IBA sought to promote renewal from within the Ruhr. Key strategies included promoting industrial heritage tourism as a strategy of regional economic restructuring (for example the Ruhr Industrial heritage trail or the Zollverein World Heritage Site, where a former coal mine is both an industrial monument, a design museum and a centre for creative industries); encouraging the growth of new industries that built on existing specialisation (in Dortmund these include e-logistics and energy technologies); converting run-down and abandoned industrial buildings for new productive use. This recycling of old buildings for new productive uses was partly a result of a struggle among planners and protection agencies who recognised that many of these industrial buildings embody the spirit of 'New Objectivity', a Bauhaus-inspired architectural movement that privileged functional qualities and guarded against building monuments for memory. The idea of preserving these buildings as heritage sites or monuments was antithetical to their conception, and so planners sought to put these spaces of industrial production to new economically productive use. I am grateful to one of the reviewers for alerting me to these debates about how to preserve industrial heritage along the Ruhr.

^v In *Synthetic Worlds* Esther Leslie demonstrates that German chemical production from the late 19th century until after the Second World War was based heavily on the production of analogues and substitutes. Enacting a rupture between human and nature – and driven in part by the effort to turn waste into value – chemistry sought to 'transform all nature into its artificial counterpart, as *natural* materials are remade *synthetically* in laboratories (Leslie, 2005, 7). These efforts were intensified in Germany after the First World War as the Versailles treaty stripped Germany of colonial holdings to pillage for natural resources, spurring alchemical dreams of transforming superabundant resources (i.e. coal) into ersatz versions of the resources that Germany lacked.